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WHAT DID CUBA DO?

Jimmy Carter took a chance two weeks ago when he blamed Cuba for the attack on Zaïre by Katangan rebels based in Angola. Carter's charge that Cuba had trained and equipped the Katangans and knew about their attack in advance set off an outcry. Last week, Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez told the United Nations that Carter's claims were "absolutely false" and were based on "impudently repeated lies." Even some of the President's own diplomats had their doubts, while a skeptical Senate Foreign Relations Committee asked CIA director Stansfield Turner to document the Administration's charges at a secret hearing this week. In fact, Carter's charges were based on slim evidence to begin with. But by last week, the CIA had compiled a thick dossier on Cuba's links with the Katangans. Said one State Department official: "I think we're out of the woods."

According to U.S. officials, Washington had about 35 separate pieces of information, including electronic intercepts and reports from agents on scene. The information, said one source, also included radio conversations between the invaders and their commander, Nataniel M'bumba, back at a rear base. There was evidence that the Cubans ran training bases in Angola. There were photographs of Cuban arms captured in Zaïre, and at least some senior Administration officials were persuaded that Cuban personnel had been on the ground in Shaba Province during the fighting, most likely at an early stage. "If you took it to a jury," said an official who had read all of the intelligence data, "you'd get a 12-to-0 vote."

With Carter presiding over a White House briefing, Turner presented some of the evidence to Congressional leaders last week and apparently convinced his audience. "I don't think there is any doubt at all that the Presi-

dent has good, hard information," Sen. Howard Baker, the Republican leader, said later. "I think the Cubans are lying." House Speaker Thomas (Tip) O'Neill added: "They've got everything. Anybody who doesn't believe it is crazy."

Although the Cubans have lied before (Fidel Castro once said he would send no troops to Angola), last week's denials were forceful and self-righteous. In an interview with NEWSWEEK, Rodríguez insisted: "We have not given this group any arms or military equipment. We have not trained these people for the invasion as has been stated by President Carter." In another interview, Angolan Prime Minister Lopo do Nascimento conceded that the Cubans had once trained the Katangans. "But the Cubans played no role in training or advising them for the current invasion, as far as I know," he said. Given such denials, some members of Congress were unwilling to automatically accept the Administration's claims. Said Sen. George McGovern: "We have all been through the fires on this kind of thing."

DOSSIER AT HAND

Other skeptics questioned whether the Cuban training operation was as recent as the White House said it was, and whether the Katangans might simply have slipped the reins, attacking Zaïre without Havana's permission. As the Administration saw it, that didn't really matter much. "We have never accused the Cuban troops of being part of the invading force," Carter said, "but there is no doubt about the fact that the Cubans have a heavy—even dominant—position in Angola, that they were involved in training the Katangans who did invade Zaïre." With his new intelligence dossier at hand, the President was unlikely to take anything back.

—RAYMOND CARROLL with THOMAS M. DEFRANK and HENRY W. HUBBARD in Washington and bureau reports